The Builder.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1852.

IS it necessary to remove the National Gallery out of London? That is the question. And for the purpose of bringing the matter prominently forward, and preparing the way for the discussion which is to take place at the Institute of Architects on Monday next, we will give the pith of Mr. C. H. Smith's paper on the subject, read at the last meeting there. Mr. Smith will therefore be considered as speaking, until we interrupt his discourse. His object was to show that the present gallery might be altered and enlarged to meet all the requirements.

Much has been said about the pernicious and destructive influence of the London atmosphere on pictures, and much more might be asserted, without proving the truth of such statements. In all cases, colours that are mixed with any kind of oil must necessarily become darker and darker by time, in consequence of the natural tendency which that vehicle has to absorb oxygen from the atmosphere: some varieties of oil, it is true, absorb it much more rapidly than others, but, sooner or later, all fatty substances employed as menstrua in painting will certainly change to a dark brown colour. In this respect, so far as the atmosphere is concerned, precisely the same change would take place, whether the pictures were exposed to the air of Lombard-street, of Trafalgar-square, or of places far remote from the busy world's unceasing sound. Castle Howard, Blenheim, and Belvoir Castle, are baronial mansions placed in the midst of beautiful woodland scenery, at distances of eight or ten miles from any large town: they all contain numerous pictures by celebrated masters, which, to the best of his recollection, are in no better state of preservation than those in the galleries at Bridgewater House, of the Marquis of Westminster, in Grosvenor-street, or the many excellent pictures that have been kept for ages in the halls of some of the companies situated in the midst of the city of London. But the best evidence that he could mention, to show that there is nothing in the situation or atmosphere of London likely to destroy or injure the beauty of pictures, is that the nine pictures painted on canvas by Rubens, which form the main portion of the ceiling of the chapel at Whitehall, have been exposed to the atmosphere in the very neighbourhood of the present National Gallery, during a period of between two and three centuries, without the advantage of any particular care or attention, and that they are even now in as good a state of preservation as if they had been painted within the last twenty years.

We must all admit that a vast difference in the amount of our laundress's bills depends on whether we reside in town or in the country: similar remarks apply to the furniture of our houses, and to our habitations generally. To appear decent, a London house should be cleaned, or fresh painted, much oftener than one in the country, but this difference arises merely from dust or soot slightly adhering to the surface, which, in the case of pictures, may be easily washed off, once in a few years, without risk of their receiving the slightest injury.

For all useful purposes, London is the only proper situation for the Picture Gallery of the British people (it is Mr. Smith who speaks): were it erected a mile or two out of the metropolis, the number of students and visitors would decrease surprisingly, in inverse proportion to the increase of distance. If there be any appreciable objection to the air of London, it must be useless to think of removing the pictures anywhere within eight or ten miles of so pestiferous a place. But convinced, after much consideration, that it will be difficult to find a better locality, or a more commanding situation for a grand public building than the north side of Trafalgar-square, he proposed to proceed at once to the question, whether the present building, forming the National Gallery and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, can be enlarged sufficiently to meet the present as well as the prospective demand for space; whether the principal elevation facing the south can be improved without great expense; whether the entire alteration and enlargement, when completed, are likely to answer the intended purpose; whether it will be worth the money it is likely to cost; or, whether it will be a waste of outlay, merely to produce a mean and unsatisfactory result.

Mr. Wilkins, the architect of the National Gallery, in his evidence before the Committee of the House of Commons, in 1836, suggested that a very considerable extension of the galleries might be obtained by the purchase of the dilapidated buildings which now occupy the site westward, at the back of the new houses in Pall-mall East. This addition alone would more than double the present space in the National Gallery. The site, however, that the speaker proposed to add was that on which now stand the workhouse buildings of St. Martin's parish, situated between Hemming's-row and Castle-street, at least an acre of ground, contained in a compact quadrangular, though not rectangular figure, immediately behind the portion allotted to the Royal Academy.

By an arrangement exhibited, six rooms or galleries, each averaging above 100 feet long by 40 wide; two, 55 by 40; three, 40 feet square, and a hexagonal room, say 45 feet diameter—or in other words, about eight times the space of the present National Gallery would be provided. The whole of these rooms would be on the first floor, that is to say, they would be nearly on a level with the present exhibition rooms, consequently there would remain the entire range of rooms on the ground floor of the proposed new building available for other purposes. He showed various improvements that might be made in the present building with its gloomy halls and staircases, but upon this we need not enter; the less so, as let what may be the opinion as to retaining the site, we are not very much disposed in favour of tinkering up the old building.

The public footway from Castle-street, through Duke's-court, to St. Martin's-lane, would remain in Mr. Smith's plan; but in order to connect the old with the new galleries, it would be necessary to build communications over Duke's-court, formed over the public way in two distinct places, at an elevation of probably 16 or 18 feet above the foot-pavement of the court.

It must be evident, he thought, that the accommodation thus proposed would be sufficient for a vast accumulation of pictures: is it, therefore, advisable to build galleries so very extensive, that they may probably remain empty for the next 100 years? But suppose all the rooms suggested to be erected on the site of the workhouse should become filled to excess with fine works of art within thirty or forty years, is it not highly probable, that during such interval an opportunity might offer to purchase the old buildings alluded to by Mr. Wilkins; or that the barracks, and the large piece of ground adjoining, which already belong to the Crown, might be vacated, for some spot more convenient for military purposes?

In reply to the second question, "Can the principal elevation be improved for a moderate outlay?" He was disposed to think that much might be done with the present materials, if differently arranged; in which case, the chief expense would be incurred for removing and refixing them. This, he thought, would probably not exceed the sum of 3,000*l.* or 4,000*l.*; but should it be considered impossible to amend the present elevation, and therefore desirable to pull it entirely down, to sell off the old stone, and to erect a new façade, with about the same amount of labour and materials, we should still retain possession of this fine situation, and the whole cost would not even then exceed some 15,000*l.* He had good authority for naming this sum, because he had made a detailed estimate of the masonry for Mr. Wilkins, and the contract for the external stone-work was taken for a trifle under that amount.

No galleries, which are decidedly erected for the display of paintings, should be architecturally decorated internally: plain, straight walls are most fit for the object in view. If ornament be admitted at all, it should be confined exclusively to the ceiling or covering; and in this respect many valuable hints might be taken from some of the recently constructed iron and glass roofs at the railway stations and termini. With regard to the exterior of the proposed additional buildings, the public thoroughfares of Duke's-court, Castle-street, and Hemming's-row, are not of sufficient importance to warrant any expenditure for the display of architectural design, not even to the extent of stone facing; therefore, perfectly plain brickwork, without break or recess of any kind, would suffice.

No part of the architectural profession, continued the speaker, appears to give so little satisfaction to the great body of artists and amateurs as that by which the architect arranges the mode of admitting daylight into picture galleries. Some of our most eminent professors have failed in this respect, and it was difficult to bring to mind any large room where the light is so admitted as to give general satisfaction to the artists who send their works for exhibition: he would ask, therefore, if this part of the subject is so difficult to determine, why not try experiments upon a large scale, at full size, and in the actual building during its progress? As soon as the general plan of the edifice is settled, the walls of one of the principal rooms might be built up to the full height, with as little delay as was consistent with sound construction. Upon these walls place a temporary roof or covering, with a superabundance of glazed

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